

From Poe to Rimbaud: A Comparative View of Symbolist Poetry

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Introduction

Between the 1850's and the 1870's, an early Symbolist aesthetic emerged in the French literary and artistic scenes as a way to express human experience through the lens of a pure artistic Ideal. Charles Baudelaire, considered by many the father of French Symbolism, defines modern art in his article "L'Art Philosophique" as "C'est créer une magie contenant à la fois l'objet et le sujet, le monde extérieur à l'artiste et l'artiste lui-même" (qtd by Erkkila 56) (It is to create a magic containing at once the object and the subject, the outside world of the artist and the artist himself). This definition, as indicative of the way artists and thus Symbolists viewed aesthetics, suggests the allusive "magic" from which Symbolist thought evolves to channel ideal Beauty. Baudelaire's association with artistic object and subject, and the external and internal world of the artist to which they refer, comes about as the necessary condition from which Symbolists experience their form of Beauty.

Working towards developing a new art form which would cast suggestive magic and allusions as more apt representations of human experience, Symbolist artists reacted against Positivism and Naturalism. Both Positivism and Naturalism, which we will explore more thoroughly in the next section, served as ways to define post- Revolutionary human individual and social experience objectively, rather than suggestively, as the Symbolists would do. Positivism, which developed in the immediate wake of the French Revolution of 1789 and extrapolated upon the work of Auguste Comte, viewed human action, experience, and decisions through science. Naturalism, which developed from Realism around the 1850s, explained moreover the scientific precision and logic it saw as

inherent in human societies. It thus used scientific analysis as a way to study human action without so much insisting that scientific processes always ruled human decisions. Symbolism reacted to both schools, seeking to explain a realm of human comprehension and experience beyond scientific evaluation.

While French society gave Symbolism initial incentive to react against scientific thought through Positivism and Naturalism, the formal mechanisms which Symbolists used to support their art came largely from Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman in the United States. It is at the point of pre- and early Symbolist aesthetic in the years between the 1850's and the 1870's that Symbolism's influence becomes specifically American, and where the point of this study lies. Early Symbolist writers derived both their artistic plan for pure poetic inspiration and the formal mechanisms which they used to represent their artistic principles from both Poe and Whitman. Although Poe did not actively participate in the French movement –he died in 1849– many critics agree that Pre-Symbolism, and thus Symbolism, would not have evolved as it did without his influence. The case of Walt Whitman, however, is much more precarious for both French and American critics. Simply put, the vast majorities of French and American scholars do not know where to place Whitman in the Symbolist tradition and so largely deny his influence in the movement. This study will support both Poe's and Whitman's roles in the Symbolist tradition and will thus challenge much of previous scholarship on Poe's and especially Whitman's influence on Symbolism.

This study will first briefly explore Positivism and Naturalism in order to understand the artistic stage onto which Symbolism emerged as a reaction against both

philosophies. I must mention here that while this study does recognize Romanticism, which emerged in the early 1800s, as an important precursor for the Symbolist aesthetic, we will not go beyond mentioning its importance in order to more fully focus on Symbolism as a reaction against Positivism and Naturalism. From here we will examine an early Symbolist aesthetic in the artistic relationship between Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire. We will then move on to discuss Walt Whitman's poetic relation to Symbolism with respect to Baudelaire. We will then discuss Whitman and the later Symbolist writer Arthur Rimbaud through their analogous use of free verse and representations of the soul. In showing both Poe's and Whitman's importance in Symbolism, this study will ultimately work to help validate American importance in the French movement, which scholars in the past have largely neglected.

Positivism to Realism

One can characterize French literary evolution between 1789 and the 1870's as a shift from objective and scientific analysis to subjective and inexact comprehension of humanity. This shift occurs in two major steps: first from French Positivism, beginning at the time of the French Revolution in 1789, to French Realism, in the 1850's: second from French Naturalism, developed out of Realism, to French Symbolism which fully emerged in the 1870's. The first step from Positivism to Realism concerns the leap from science as the objective molding force of individual human action in society, to a shrewder more accurate, view of collective social and personal experiences. The second step from Naturalism to Symbolism involves a Symbolist reaction against many

Naturalist principles and ideas, along with a movement away from a concern with science and logic to a concern with indefinable mystery. By understanding these literary shifts, we can thus begin to see how Symbolism culturally sprung into French society as a challenge to both Positivism and Naturalism.

French Positivism appeared in France through the work of philosopher Auguste Comte as a scientific way in which to explain the violent human behavior surrounding the French Revolution of 1789. Positivism largely considered the human subject as a product of scientific predisposition. Hélène Metzger says of Positivist doctrine : “la doctrine est alors éclairée non du dehors par ses conséquences, mais du dedans par ses origines psychologiques...” (Metzger 365) (“the doctrine is thus illuminated not exteriorly by its consequences, but interiorly by its psychological origins”). In other words, Metzger asserts that Positivist thought largely concerns the interior, scientifically predisposed world of a human subject as opposed to its exterior, socially changing world. Comte believed the human mind, and thus the human subject of which the mind was a part, passes through three successive states to construct personal values: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positivist or scientific. The theological stage supports that “divine plan” rules human action through divine will. The metaphysical stage supports that all individuals take part in a social contract, at the bottom of which lies a natural desire for liberty: the driving force for the decision-making process at this level. The positivist or scientific stage, and ultimate end point for Comte in explaining the undercurrent to human behavior, addresses the turn away from questioning human experience to a heavy reliance on both the hard and social sciences. By making the scientific stage his end

point, Comte's doctrine thus objectifies human experience through scientific analysis to show that science is the common vantage point from which all humanity operates. For example, if a Positivist thinker were to explain social upheaval in the Revolution of 1789, they would first assert at the theological level that God created the ruling and working class to be in conflict with one another. They would then assert that working class desire for liberty from monarchical rule, in the metaphysical stage, would ignite conflict between the groups. However, instead of singularly attributing the Revolution to desire for liberty, Positivists would step away from the conflict to treat its cause more theoretically. They would assert in the positivist, or scientific stage, that biological or psychological predisposition offers humans the opportunity to cognitively process the value system which leads them to create social change. This would thus prove that objective scientific force ultimately directs all human action, and in so doing offers a singular scientific base from which Positivists understand human action.

Stemming from Positivism, and in reaction to the highly emotional, feeling-based Romantic Movement, Realism emerged in the French literary scene around 1850. Lawrence Schehr describes Realism and the forces which shaped its aesthetic by saying: "Realism is the accurate representation of the world in which it arises, the modes for that representation being given according to the models afforded by the nineteenth century. Such paradigms and materials include the underlying laws at work: laws of history, economy, psychology, and exchange that are believed to be universals at the time of writing" (Schehr 1-2). The social laws and human experiences which Positivism earlier objectified theoretically through science take new form through Realism to give a more

accurate representation of the world as humans actually experience it. As the popular class, which fought for, but did not achieve, equality in the Revolution fifty years earlier, socially evolved and realized a new set of social struggles, Realism offered a lens through which they could express social concern.

An important extension and further specification of Realist doctrine, as we have seen, is Naturalism. Alfred Schinz specifies Naturalism by saying: “[Naturalism] is the introduction of science into literature, and especially the introduction of scientific proceedings into literature” (Schinz 274). Relating Naturalism to Realism French critic Colette Becker explains: “Le réalisme constitue la notion élargie, tandis que le naturalisme est la notion plus restreinte, puisqu’il utilise et accepte comme prémisses tous les principes fondamentaux et la thématique du réalisme” (Becker 560) (Realism constitutes the enlarged notion, whereas naturalism is the more restrained notion, since it uses and accepts as premises all the fundamental and thematic principles of realism). Synthesizing both critics’ views of Realism and Naturalism we can assert that Realism is the larger governing idea under which Naturalism operates to further define its own principles through science. Commenting further on the connection between the scientific views of Naturalism, Schinz explains: “In science the absolute and the so-called metaphysical are banished from the beginning; everything is examined from the relative point of view of cause and effect” (Schinz 274). This cause and effect relation and the banishment of metaphysics through science show two ways Naturalists studied humanity to accurately portray human experience through science.

Responding to Realism and passionately opposing Naturalism, Symbolism emerged into French society. Symbolism came about, as Schinz says in his article “Literary Symbolism in France,” as “a reaction against the naturalistic literature of yesterday” (Schinz 274). In 1886, more than a decade after Symbolism’s recognized genesis, *Le Figaro*, a French literary publication, published an article entitled “Le Symbolisme” by Jean Moréas stating the Symbolist Manifesto: “...dans cet art, les tableaux de la nature, les actions des humains, tous les phénomènes ne sauraient se manifester eux-mêmes; ce sont là des apparences sensibles destinées à représenter leurs affinités ésotériques avec des Idées primordiales” (Moréas 1-2). (...in this art, scenes from nature, human actions, and all other phenomena will not be described for their own sake; they are here tangible appearances destined to represent their esoteric affinities with primordial Ideas). As Symbolism thus largely concerns the use of that which appears in life as a manifestation of a higher ideal, and not simply as a scientific representation of itself, as Naturalist logic would suggest, Symbolism presents a view of the world that transcends the real.

Five Features of Symbolism

As this study concerns the evolution of Symbolism from Positivist, Naturalist, and American influence, we will examine five main features which are common in Symbolist poetry to see how each influence reflects elements of Symbolism. While these features are a departure from our earlier discussion of Positivism, Realism, and Naturalism, they will show how Symbolists responded to and reacted against the earlier art forms. I have

further defined Schinz's five elements of Symbolism, which overlooked Symbolist exoticism and synesthesia, as: linking various effects, infusing effect into symbols, employing exotic location, using human passivity, and evoking synesthetic reaction.

The necessity for Symbolist writers to link effects, or to create effectual chains, as replacements for traditional cause and effect chains comes about as a reaction against the science of Naturalist thinkers. Symbolist writers achieve effectual linkage by stringing together various series of emotions and evocations to support an associative cognitive process and to also reject one single defined conclusion in their work. For example, in Charles Baudelaire's poem "Parfum Exotique" or "Exotic Perfume" effect unifies the poem as the speaker describes a scene in which he rests upon a lover's body while his mind strays to an exotic marine landscape. Traveling from eroticism to exoticism, the speaker evokes the effect of warmth in such words as "un soir chaud d'automne" ("a hot autumn evening") (Baudelaire 71, ln 1) and "ton sein chaleureux" ("your warm breast") (Baudelaire 71, ln 2) as his mind moves from a lover's body to a natural landscape. This warmth mixes with the smell of his lover's breast which draws him "vers de charmants climat" ("towards charming climates") (Baudelaire 72, ln 9). The effect of smell and warmth thus mix, as the speaker says, "dans mon âme au chant des mariniers" ("in my soul with the sailors' song") (Baudelaire 72, ln 14). The end to this effectual chain is thus the contemplation of song and feeling rather than a conclusion which objectifies human experience, as a more Realist text would offer. As Symbolism also existed outside the realm of literature, particularly in painting, it is common for many later Symbolist writers to refer to other spheres of artistic representation when explaining their

own. Symbolist writer Stéphane Mallarmé says that the goal of art is to “peindre non la chose mais l’effet qu’elle produit” (To paint not the thing but the effect it produces). As we will see through another employment of effectual linkage in Baudelaire’s “La Vie Antérieure,” Symbolists strive to evoke emotion through effect.

Explaining effect infused into symbols, the second element of importance for Symbolists, Alfred Schinz says of the interaction between thought, words, and the symbol:

Thought is too subtle and varied to be really adequately expressed; words are too coarse interpreters to have the delicate feelings and sentiments of a poetic soul entrusted to them. Not only, therefore, must no effort be made to express one’s feelings, to define them by words, but in order to be sure not to rob them of the airy something that is in them, one must speak only to the indefinite form of symbols (Schinz 284).

Symbolists thus employ the symbol as a necessary additive to their literature as it respects that which language cannot uphold, and that which also expresses “the airy something” in words. The evocative power laden in the symbol has the ability to allude to specific emotion while all the while never explaining the emotion itself. In other words, the artist takes care to evoke emotions through symbols which they will never define but which it will instead connect to other symbols and thus other evocations.

The third feature of Symbolism concerns ambiguous geographic placement with exotic features. Alfred Schinz believes that for Symbolist literature, “it is impossible to find a world that would permit of placing geographically the locality of the scene”

(Schinz 275). While Schinz is right in that it may be impossible to place Symbolist literature, one can further specify his assertion by pointing out two features common in spatial situations in Symbolist writings: contemporary societies and exotic atmospheres. Creating a way for contemporary readers to deal with their experiences of modernity, Symbolists often combine the loathsome banality of contemporary cities with the idealized dream of an exotic locality. This same preoccupation with exotic localities as a way in which to both flee society and more fully engage life reflects itself in the lives of proto-Symbolist writer Charles Baudelaire and Symbolist writer Arthur Rimbaud. Baudelaire first traveled to the island of Mauritius in 1841 at the age of twenty. His (in)famous work *Les Fleurs du Mal*, published in 1857 and in an expanded version in 1861, explores at great depth the exotic as an idealized condition for poetic inspiration and personal engagement. As we before saw with our brief look at “Parfum Exotique”, and will again see in “La Vie Antérieure”, Baudelaire imagines exotic localities as a type of retreat from quotidian life. Arthur Rimbaud also experienced exoticism at the age of twenty in 1874 when he became disillusioned and moved to Africa, abandoning his life as a poet. One can see Rimbaud’s concern with exotic escape in “Le Bateau Ivre” or “The Drunken Boat” when the vessel expresses need to flee the rivers of civilization for the exotic adventures of the raging sea. Within the works of both artists, and for Symbolism at large, one can conclude that the element of exoticism adds a necessary feature which reflects the preoccupation within the movement for pure poetic engagement removed from the confines of ordinary city life.

A fourth feature of Symbolism concerns the attitude of passivity. Being natural

thinkers, dreamers and empyreal philosophers (Schinz 280), Symbolist writers find empowerment in passive thought as opposed to active engagement. In attempting to explain Symbolist melancholy, Schinz says, “Joy is found in action, and when man does not act, he feels no joy. So, as joy connected in the mind with the idea of activity, sadness is associated with the thought of passivity. The sadness of the Symbolists is a sort of boredom” (Schinz 280). While Schinz very accurately points to Symbolist passivity as a state of mind which many of our authors inhabit, he too hastily subscribes a pejorative connotation to their state as boredom. Symbolists passively participate in societies of which they do not see themselves a part, and so therefore offer such passivity as a way in which to engage the very modernity to which they cannot relate. They retreat into a more idealized and intellectualized space, like the speaker whose soul mixes with the sailors’ song in “Parfum Exotique.” It is within these contemplative spaces where Symbolists yearn and languish for the ideals their literature represents, but which they can never know as modern humans.

A fifth feature of Symbolism concerns “the overlapping of different perceptions and thoughts...” (Schinz, 289) leading to the desired effect of synesthesia. One can define synesthesia as the involuntary linkage or association of one sensory pathway with another. Symbolists achieve this effect as an end product of effectual linkage. As the inherent tangibility of each symbol gives way to the actual associations and allusions which are latent within them, symbols begin to serve as catalysts for the soulful transcendence of the synesthetic experience. One synesthetic reaction occurs in the poem “Correspondances” by Charles Baudelaire. Describing his surroundings as he passes into

“des forêts de symboles” (Baudelaire 55, ln 3) (“forests of symbols”) his perceptions and senses all mix in the clearness of the night. The speaker thus confuses smells, colors and sounds to invoke synesthetic reaction: “Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté, / Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent” (Baudelaire 55, ln 7-8) (“Vast as night and as light, the perfumes, the colors, and the sounds answer each other”). Ultimately, this synesthetic reaction propels Baudelaire’s speaker, and Symbolist artists more largely, into a deeper state of inner awareness. It transcends corporeal limitations and elevates literature from a dialogue between the human subject and words to a conversation between symbol and soul. As we will later explore the source of synesthesia through Whitman’s practice of metempsychosis, this conversation between human, literature, and soul may have a very specific American root or at least an analogous complement.

In turning to “La Vie Antérieure” or “Past Life”, one poem contained within Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*, we can test our before mentioned five elements of Symbolism to see how they truly work in a poetic context. Because I will often combine stanzas to show how Symbolic images transfer across strophic breaks, I will show the poem here in its entirety:

J’ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques
 Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux,
 Et que leurs grands piliers, droits et majestueux,
 Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.

Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,
 Mêlaient d’une façon solennelle et mystique

Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique

Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,

Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs

Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs,

Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,

Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir

Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir. (Baudelaire 62-63)

The first element of Symbolism apparent in “La Vie Antérieure” concerns that of exotic location. Baudelaire situates the speaker of his poem in an exotic context so as to suggest that exoticism is the condition under which his speaker operates to experience allusive poetic ideal. As the speaker of “La Vie Antérieure” temporally and spatially situates himself in the first two lines of the poem, he uses exotic elements and a seemingly contradictory verb form to establish the foreignness of his own condition. He begins: “J’ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques / Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux” (Baudelaire 1-2, 62-63) “(I have for a long time lived under vast porticos / Which marine suns dyed with a thousand fires).” The speaker begins with the use of a form of the French past tense, *le passé composé*, or the past perfect. One uses such a verb tense to describe an event in the past which happened at one specific moment and did not exhibit a habitual tendency. When juxtaposed with the adverb “longtemps”, which implies a continuity of habitual pattern in the past, the speaker seems

to expand that which is inherent in the specificity of his verb form. Through this very juxtaposition of verb and adverb he suggests that one can experience an event at one specific time in the past and yet modify that event to exist forever in the mind of the subject. The reader can then understand this layered notion of temporal orientation to be the very reality of the poem's subject. Just as Baudelaire spatially situates the speaker in foreign context, one can also read his temporal orientation as exotic for its removal from the linear time of quotidian life.

While this first line orients the reader in the speaker's temporal context, the second line places the reader in the speaker's spatial context. The speaker specifically locates himself under tangible, or at least imaginably tangible, "porticos" to then further situate himself in an exotic marine environment. Within this exotic locality, the speaker invokes the power of the sun which dyed his habitation a thousand warm colors, literally translated from French comes as "a thousand fires". These fiery colors serve to illuminate and enliven the speaker's living space so as to enrich his perceptions and ignite his senses.

In continuing the description of his spatial orientation in lines nine and ten of the poem, the speaker employs sexuality and more color as additives to his world: "C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes, / Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs" (Baudelaire 9-10, 63) "(It's there that I've lived in the voluptuous calm, / In the midst of the azure, of waves, of splendors)." The speaker curiously describes the calm in which he dwelled with the sexualized word "volupté". In French, there are generally two ways to describe sexual pleasure: "le plaisir" and "la volupté". "Le plaisir," which translates

into English simply as “pleasure” is far from being a word of neutral connotation, yet simply does not compare to the sexuality contained within a word like “la volupté,” which translates into English as voluptuousness. For the speaker to describe his state of reposeful calm with such a hyperbolic form of sexuality, readers can certainly deduce that his realm of habitation is one of hyper-erotic exoticism.

However, so as to almost quench these fires of passion, the speaker further describes his exotic setting with the reference to the coolness of azure waves and similarly colored “splendors”. As the sun and sexuality of his immediate exotic surroundings warm the speaker’s senses to a state of arousal, these waters and ambiguous splendors contradictorily act to cool the passion which rouses the speaker to full awareness of his immediate surroundings.

In describing two more poetic features, the effectual chain and the symbol, the speaker’s narrative moves from a temporal and spatial orientation with the intention of blurring the distinction between the natural perfection of exotic mystery and his own corporeal limitations: “Et que leurs grandes piliers, droits et majestueux, / Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques. / Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux, / Mêlaient d’une façon solennelle et mystique / Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique / Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux” (Baudelaire 3-8, 63) (“And that their large pillars, straight and majestic, / Rendered the same, in the evening, as basaltic grottos. / The swells, rolling images of the skies, / Mixed in a solemn and mystical way / The all-powerful chords of their rich music / With the colors of the setting sun reflected by my eyes”).

Using the large pillars of his previously established portico, the speaker juxtaposes the portico, a more or less tangible location, with the less definite effectual link of an evening to a basaltic grotto. This effect of evening darkness connected to the volcanic mystery of a basaltic grotto transports the speaker to a locality outside of human construct to one in which profluent abstruseness rules human emotion. In other words, at this point the speaker moves from the imperfection of humanity's stable portico into the plane of the poetic ideal of his basaltic grotto, a retreat with the explosive potential of a volcano.

Developing symbolic representations of nature's perfection through the interaction between the sky and the sea the speaker effectually likens nature's musical and visual harmony to an incipient moment of synesthesia. The English translation of the relationship between the swells of the sea and the image of the skies loses the sonorous connection Baudelaire crafts with "Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux" (Baudelaire 5, 63). This connection between musicality and nature is important as the speaker describes the solemn and mystical way in which the swells and skies mix as representative of the all-powerful harmony of their inherent music. In translation however, one can still see this effectual connection by examining the images without the rhyme of the original French. As the swells move through the skies, mixing by way of one's reflection upon the other, readers can gather the essence of their solemn and mystical union from the speaker's vantage point. This mélange of sounds and images marks the first moment of synesthesia in the poem. It continues to evolve as their natural union and the setting sun's colors reflect in the corporeal limitation of the speaker's eyes:

“Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux”, denoting fully fledged synesthesia. He can see and feel natural harmony all around him through the effects they produce mixing with one another, but can never fully participate in this natural realm as the light he sees reflects by his eyes and does not consume them wholly. This natural realm thus continues to be for him a source of unattainable and idealized mystery.

As the speaker travels from the realm of natural mystery back into human confines, he fully experiences the last two symbolic elements: passivity and synesthesia. As the former propels the speaker into a state of the latter, the symbol of naked slaves leads the speaker to reveal his yearning desire in the same verbal confusion with which he began his narrative. He says in conclusion of the poem: “Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d’odeurs, / Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes, Et dont l’unique soin était d’approfondir / Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir (Baudelaire 11-14, 63).” “(And naked slaves, all impregnated with odors, / Who used to fan my forehead with palm branches/ And whose only care was to deepen / The secret grief which made me languish).” As his naked slaves take care to fan the speaker and his desire, like embers in a fire, the speaker sinks further into a realm of internal languish connected to his experience of synesthesia and reflected through his use of the past imperfect. The speaker’s synesthetic experience, which before mixed his perceptions with nature through sight and sound, now includes the smell of the slaves “tout imprégnés d’odeurs.” The slaves, who represent manifestations of corporeal sexuality, with which the speaker identifies, and exotic sentiment, connect him to physical sexuality through their smell and the touch of the cool breeze of their fans which “rafraîchissaient le front.” Their duty to

fan the speaker's forehead with the intention of cooling his warm body only exacerbates his sensory experience by waking corporeal sexuality and pleasure. As the sounds and images of nature earlier mixed, now the smells and touch the fans mix as a type of synesthetic culmination the speaker describes as languor. It is here that one can turn to Baudelaire's use of the past imperfect to understand the poem's conclusion and the languor he attaches to synesthesia. He employs the verb tense to describe the pleasure which the slaves habitually intensify in conjunction with his earlier use of the past perfect, showing that his ultimate desire is to live habitually in the pleasure of a singular past moment. This pleasure thus becomes "Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir" for the Symbolist speaker. As he longs to live in a permanent state of sensually bonded synesthesia, but realizes the only way to live in such a state is through mental contemplation of the past, the speaker's physical distance from sensual stimulation gives him reason to yearn for his past life.

Although we have traced five major themes common in most Symbolist literature, we do so while looking towards American influence in the literary movement as the true focus of this study. With that said, I will centralize this discussion of Symbolism, and American influence in it, in the realm of previous scholarship while adding my own interpretations and translations of texts. With the ultimate hope, however, of showing American importance in the French movement, I will often challenge certain French and American literary scholars who deny American importance in the movement. This challenge will serve to see whether such critics' claims reflect valid literary criticism or if

they simply show reticence to recognize part of French Symbolism's genesis as American.

Poe's Poetic Function

As one of the most important influences for early Symbolist writers, Edgar Allan Poe inspired French poets through his theoretical representation of poetry and through the conviction with which he lived his poetic principles. As P. Mansell Jones says of Poe's theoretic principle in "Poe, Baudelaire and Mallarmé: A Problem of Literary Judgment": "It is here we touch the 'greatness' of Poe, in the inerrancy of his premonitions for poetry as well as in his generous effort to defend poetry as an exercise of the spirit operating on the plane of the ideal, to adapt such a defense to a popular level and to formulate it in the teeth of the moralizing vindictiveness of native hacks and hypocrites" (Jones, 245-246).

Poe discusses his preoccupation with "poetry as an exercise of the spirit operating on the plane of the ideal" in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). In this essay Poe addresses two elements necessary in literary creation which also translate into the Symbolist tradition: effect and Beauty. Poe says in "The Philosophy of Composition" concerning the importance of effect:

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect. Keeping originality *always* in view— for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" (Poe 431)

Poe evokes effect to enliven “the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul” through literature because, like Symbolists, he sees the purpose of literature as one which, as critic Marcel Françon says, “élève l’âme et la console” (raises the soul and consoles it) (Françon 843). He ultimately sees effect as the purest way to suggest poetic Beauty which dwells on the same plane as the soul. He says of the relation between effect and Beauty:

That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect – they refer in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of *soul* – *not* of intellect, or of heart – upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating “the beautiful” (Poe 433)

Poe takes special care here to note that effect in his literature does not serve to elevate the intellect or the heart to fill readers’ spirits with universal well being. Instead, his “pure elevation of soul” propels readers to an inner disconnect between immortal soul and mortal body in the contemplation of the beautiful. This elevation thus subsequently yields inner torment as the subject in the poem comes to the realization that soulful torment continues well after mortal life. He says, in “The Philosophy of Composition” concerning effect in his poem “The Raven,” that the bird is “emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*” (Poe 442). The raven serves as Poe’s poetic contemplation between immortal and mortal torture. Poe’s speaker realizes that his soul’s torment carries on after life in saying that: “my soul *from out that shadow* that lies

floating on the floor / Shall be lifted – nevermore” (Poe 442). As we earlier experienced Baudelaire’s ambiguously deployed verb forms of in “La Vie Antérieure” to show how one moment can reflect eternal languor, the speaker’s torment in “The Raven” shows similar eternal torment. Symbolists possibly appropriated Poe’s idea of immortal and mortal disconnect leading to physical languish to express their own interpretation of poetic Beauty.

Poe’s “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” (1845), or as Baudelaire translated it, “La Vérité sur le cas de M. Valdemar”, serves as one of the best representations of Poe’s theoretical discussion of literature. Since Baudelaire translated and published this particular story in 1856, along with a larger collection of Poe’s stories entitled *Histoires Extraordinaires*, when citing from the English text I will also include the French quotation next to that of the English, in order to demonstrate the French-American bond through subject and language as they cross from English to French.

“The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” largely concerns the relationship between the formulaic science of death and the inexplicable ambiguity of human mortality. In other words, the shift this story makes from definite to indefinite understandings of death through science similarly reflects the larger Symbolist move from the exactitudes of Positivism and Naturalism to the ambiguity of Symbolism. The speaker of the story offers mesmerism “in articulo mortis,” or “at the moment of death,” as the way to blur the distinction between objectively tested science and subjectively perceived mortality. The narrator of the tale, who is the same man who performs the mesmeric act upon his friend M. Ernest Valdemar, begins his narrative by saying: “It is

now rendered necessary that I give the facts— as far as I comprehend them myself” (Poe 50) (“Il est maintenant devenu nécessaire que je donne les faits, autant du moins que les comprends moi-même”) (Poe, Baudelaire 209). In placing this account in the largest framework of fact steeped in human fallibility, the speaker addresses the relationship between objective fact and subjective understanding of such fact. As a result of this fallible subjectivity, the speaker offers a three-layered lens through which his readers can approach this tale. They can believe the facts as objective truths, as products of human imagination and interpretation, or as a permutation of the two.

Close to death, M. Valdemar calls upon his friend to perform an act of mesmerism in order to prolong his life. Upon meeting Valdemar in his chambers, the narrator finds his friend among medical doctors who can no longer help the suffering man and who consequently entrust the narrator’s mesmeric act as a replacement for science. After the narrator performs several passes of his hand over Valdemar’s withering body, Valdemar falls silent. At this point the reader can see the result of the narrator’s pseudo medicine. He says of Valdemar’s inward state, as reflected through his outward appearance:

At five minutes before eleven, I perceived unequivocal signs of the mesmeric influence. The glassy roll of the eye was changed for that expression of uneasy *inward* examination which is never seen except in the cases of sleep-waking, and which is quite impossible to mistake (Poe 53).

A onze heures moins cinq minutes, j’aperçus des symptômes non équivoques de l’influence magnétique. Le vacillement vitreux de l’oeil s’était changé en cette expression pénible de regard *en dedans* qui ne se voit jamais que dans les cas de

somnambulisme, et à laquelle il est impossible de se méprendre (Poe, Baudelaire 213).

As Poe blended notions of objective fact and subjective human interpretation in the expository paragraph as his speaker promised to “give the facts— as far as I comprehend them myself” (Poe 50), he again harmonizes objective and subjective variables while developing effect. By situating the narrative at the exact moment of “five minutes before eleven,” an entirely arbitrary but objectively precise time, the narrator temporally validates the series of events he thereafter accounts. He juxtaposes this objective temporal frame with Valdemar’s uneasy state of half-life in order to thus validate his subjective comprehension of Valdemar’s difficult to comprehend state. He here moves to the exchange between Valdemar’s “glassy role of the eye...for that expression of uneasy inward examination...” to evocatively develop the underlying mystery of the story. The fact that the speaker characterizes Valdemar’s inward retreat with uneasiness suggests that the inner human realm Valdemar sees also gives him reason to be troubled. Whatever this reason may be, the speaker does not explore at this point because Poe’s emphasis here is to use effect to evoke a feeling of suspense instead of to resolve Valdemar’s inner conundrum.

In concluding this tale, Poe again juxtaposes objective temporal context and subjective human perception with effect by fusing Valdemar’s mesmeric experience with his inexplicable corporeal dissolution. After summoning Valdemar from the space between sleep and death, amidst Valdemar’s guttural pleas for release from his state of half death, the narrator decides to formally wake him so that he can in fact die. He says

of this waking process:

For what really occurred, however, it is quite impossible that any human being could have been prepared. As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes, amid ejaculations of ‘dead! dead!’ absolutely *bursting* from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once— within the space of a single minute, or even less, shrunk— crumbled, absolutely *rotted* away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome— of detestable putridity (Poe 58).

Quant à ce qui arriva en réalité, aucun être humain n’aurait jamais pu s’y attendre; c’est au-delà de toute possibilité. Comme je faisais rapidement les passes magnétiques à travers les cris de ‘Mort! mort!’ qui faisaient littéralement explosion sur la langue et non sur les lèvres du sujet, –tout son corps, –d’un seul coup, –dans l’espace d’une minute, et même moins, – se déroba, – s’émietta, – se pourrit absolument sous mes mains. Sur le lit, devant tous les témoins, gisait une masse dégoûtante et quasi liquide, –une abominable putréfaction (Poe, Baudelaire 219).

The speaker here hinges the blurring between objective fact and subjective account mid-passage by describing Valdemar’s physical dissolution “within the space of a single minute, or even less.” From this objective temporal hinge, Poe allows the reader to experience both effect and processing of effect through human perception grounded in objectified time. From this temporal situation the reader experiences Valdemar’s desperation for freedom from his body. However, the release Valdemar finds at this

moment is not one of peace for either subject or reader, but instead a testament to the true vileness inevitable in the human condition. Instead of choosing to live a troubled half-life in human form with “that expression of uneasy inward examination” (Poe 53), examining that which is inherent and evil in the human soul, Valdemar pleads through “ejaculations of ‘dead!’ ‘dead!’” to leave his corporeal legacy in “a nearly liquid mass of loathsome— of detestable putridity.” Poe’s employment of effects such as desperate cries and corporeal rot relate to his theoretical dealing with poetic Beauty as a “mournful and never-ending remembrance”. The soul’s torment manifests independently of corporeal dissolution, and thus gives reason for worry as soulful torture continues indefinitely after mortal life. In other words, as Baudelaire showed through his verb tenses, when passing through human reflection or soulful continuation, a punctuated experience has the capacity to forever torment the mind or soul.

Aside from the theoretical comparison between Baudelaire and Poe, Baudelaire’s specific use of the same imagery and vocabulary in his poem “Une Charogne” as Poe uses in “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” links the two artists. In “Une Charogne” or “A Carrion”, Baudelaire’s speaker recounts a lovely day when while walking he comes across a decaying body on the side of the road. He describes the rotting corpse: “Les mouches bourdonnaient sur ce ventre putride, / D’où sortaient de noirs bataillons / De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais liquide / Le long de ces vivants haillons.” (Baudelaire 17-20, 78) (“The flies were buzzing on this putrid stomach. / From where were leaving black battalions / Of larva, which ran like a thick liquid / The length of these living rags”). Since he was reading and translating Poe before he published this

poem in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, one can conclude that aside from using Poe's poetic theory, Baudelaire also could have borrowed specific words and images from the American writer. Baudelaire's use of the words "putride" and "un épais liquide" in the passage above analogously align with Poe's description of Valdemar's expiration as "a nearly liquid mass of loathsome— of detestable putridity." This type of evidence only continues to strengthen the bond between Baudelaire and Poe and thus between American influence in the development of French Symbolism.

In addition to his theoretical treatment of literature, Poe's vehement artistic defense of poetic idealism against a society "of native hacks" (Jones 246) also attracted Symbolist writers. As Perry Miller says of Poe's relationship to contemporary America in *The Raven and the Whale: Poe, Melville and the New York Literary Scene*: "Poe was a lone voice" (Miller 282) who "had never been a patriot and was patently a disgrace to the nation" (Miller 145). Poe partially gained this poor relationship with American society for his involvement in what became known as "The Longfellow War" of 1845. Poe's attack on Longfellow in this dispute was both an attack on the fellow American writer's artistic credibility and life as a writer. Kenneth Silverman explains in his biography *Eggar A. Poe: A Biography, Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* that Poe accused Longfellow of plagiarism when Longfellow translated an English poem, which was in German, back into its original English, and then took credit for the English translation as his original discovery. "The Longfellow War" thus began when a "newspaper published a lengthy letter by a purported acquaintance of Longfellow who signed himself Outis, the Greek word for 'Nobody'". He argued that the existence of very similar elements in two

literary works does not prove literary theft” (Silverman 250). In response to this letter, which Silverman says Poe most likely wrote himself in order to carry out “anonymous dialogues with himself in print,” Poe mounted a siege against Longfellow. Poe attacked his work as “exceedingly feeble” and “mere prose” (Silverman 253) while simultaneously attacking his non-literary life. Silverman says, “Longfellow could not have won his reputation, Poe said, ‘without the adventitious influence of his social position as Professor of Modern Languages and Belles Lettres at HARVARD’” (Silverman 254). Poe’s scathing and unforgiving appraisal of Longfellow as both man and artist supports Poe’s belief that worthwhile art is not only that which reinvents artistic form to elevate literature from “mere prose” to a haunting state of “mournful and never-ending remembrance”. It is also perhaps that which works against institutional acceptance of conventional or less daring art. As Harvard validated Longfellow’s literature as worthwhile, and Poe did not believe him a worthy artist, Poe thus invalidates Longfellow against the institution which accepted him and fostered his academic life. For Symbolists who were searching for a new way to represent human experience in the wake of institutionally accepted Positivism and Realism, they certainly would have found a guide in Poe as both a theoretical supporter of Beauty and a social combatant for artistic revolution.

Baudelaire and Poe

After independently seeing like poetic principles in Baudelaire’s work in “La Vie Antérieure” and Poe’s “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” we will now more

explicitly examine Poe's influence on Baudelaire. Poe fully emerged in the French literary scene in 1857 after Baudelaire translated and published a collection of Poe's work which he entitled *Histoires Extraordinaires*. As critic P.M. Jones says of Baudelaire's relation to Poe: "To many readers in France Baudelaire has been known as the translator of Poe's tales rather than the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal*" (Jones 237). But whereas Jones defines "Baudelaire's practical devotion to the work of Poe simply as a labor of haute vulgarisation" (Jones 238), French critics see the two artists' analogous representation of tormented human experience as vastly more important to a literary tradition.

French Critic Marcel Françon suggests that one can place Poe's importance in the French literary tradition by first understanding the similarly disenfranchised social functions both Poe and Baudelaire shared in their respective cultural and artistic milieus:

Tous deux avaient souffert, tous deux étaient morts dans les circonstances d'une tristesse poignante. On s'imaginait en France que Poe avait été obligé de lutter pour des idées qui étaient combattues en Amérique, comme elles l'avaient été de l'autre côté de l'Atlantique (Françon 852) (Both had suffered, both had died in circumstances of a poignant sadness. One imagined in France that Poe had been forced to struggle for ideas that were fought in America like they had been on the other side of the Atlantic.)

As Françon points out, one major point of comparison for Poe and Baudelaire is manifest in their struggle to defend the same poetic ideals each of their societies equally misunderstood and equally condemned. Guy Michaud says of the poet's social role:

“...c’est que la Beauté idéale est inaccessible, et que le devoir de l’artiste – et du poète – est de découvrir cette Beauté dans ce qui nous entoure, à travers l’actuel, le particulier, l’individuel” (Michaud 63) (“...it is that ideal Beauty is inaccessible, and that the duty of the artist – and of the poet – is to discover this Beauty in what surrounds us, through the actual, the particular, the individual”). Both Baudelaire and Poe worked, as Michaud’s statement frames the purpose of the poet, to expose the Beauty in the every day which others in a more Realist school would overlook in order to describe actuality instead of poetic idealism. Both Baudelaire’s and Poe’s artistic employment and defense of ideal Beauty led to similar social ostracisms. Poe’s critics attempted to invalidate his work by attacking him as “too mean for hate” and “hardly worthy of scorn” (Miller 162), while French society received Baudelaire’s works with equal disdain. As critic Jonathan Culler says of French society’s acceptance of Baudelaire’s poetry in 1857: “His major work, *The Flowers of Evil*, was prosecuted for outrage to public decency. Ordered by the court to suppress six of the poems, Baudelaire revised and enlarged the collection and republished it in 1861” (Culler i). *Les Fleurs du Mal* projects the same idea embedded in Poe’s literature of effect leading to ideal Beauty which serves as an ultimate way to torture human spirit.

The very title *Les Fleurs du Mal* explains Baudelaire’s dealing with what Poe before established with effect and Beauty as humanity’s enigmatic and “mournful and never-ending remembrance”. In her book *Walt Whitman Among the French: Poet and Myth* (1980), Betsy Erkkila hypothesizes as to exactly what Baudelaire means with *Les Fleurs du Mal* or *The Flowers of Evil* as representative of his poetic plan. She says that

within “the theme of good coming from evil, or ‘fleurs du mal’ ... Baudelaire saw the involvement of good with evil as a symbol of the irony and ambiguity of the human condition” (Erkkila 56). One way in which Baudelaire represented what Erkkila identifies as the ironic and ambiguous state of the human condition manifests itself in the evolution of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Jonathan Culler reports that Baudelaire first advertised his collection of poetry as *The Lesbians*. He then referred to his collection as *Les Limbes*, or *Limbo*, between 1848 and 1851. “Finally in 1855 the *Revue des deux mondes* printed eighteen poems under the title, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and the complete collection appeared in 1857” (Culler i). In each projected title, Baudelaire refers to an enigmatic state of being. Lesbian desire nullifies the masculine role in sexual experience, thus challenging and leaving male desire unrealized and unneeded. The notion of limbo, where souls hang between absolute rest in heaven and absolute torment in hell, represents an intermediary space where one never finds fulfillment. The idea then of *The Flowers of Evil* suggests a like state of being where good and evil speak to, but never define the ambiguity of the human condition.

As Baudelaire evokes that which can neither be suppressed nor fulfilled in the human spirit, he does so as a development from Poe’s own artistic plan. Baudelaire says of his understanding of Poe’s work: “C’est quelque chose de profond et de miroitant comme le rêve, de mystérieux et de parfait comme le crystal” (qtd by Jones 244) (It’s something deep and reflective like the dream, mysterious and perfect like crystal). Unable to explain exactly that which draws him to Poe’s work, but able to appreciate it through the haunting clarity of crystal and the mysterious depth of dreams, Baudelaire

artistically aligns himself with Poe. Just as Poe initially used his idea of effect leading to “mournful and never-ending remembrance” as a way to express the tortured disconnect between soul and body, Baudelaire uses Poe’s plan to evoke but to never explain indefinable states of corporeal and metaphysical being.

Although Baudelaire’s artistic plan strongly aligns with that of Poe’s, many French critics are hesitant to give the American poet full credit in the Symbolist project. As Françon says of Baudelaire’s poetic development: “Pour comprendre l’influence de Poe sur Baudelaire, il faut moins tenir compte de ce qu’était Baudelaire avant qu’il eût connu l’oeuvre de Poe, que rechercher dans quelle mesure les idées et les théories de ce dernier sont originales” (Françon 846) (To understand Poe’s influence on Baudelaire, it is necessary to take account less of what Baudelaire was before he had known Poe’s work than to seek to what degree the ideas and theories of the latter are original). Françon’s judgment is here incomplete in that he does not say where or how Baudelaire searched for his own poetic theories before he knew of Poe. Instead, he attempts to invalidate the degree of Poe’s influence in Baudelaire’s art while never explaining fully his argument. In not giving full credit to Poe’s influence on Baudelaire’s life, Françon also ignores Baudelaire’s own opinion of Poe in relation to French literature. As Jones says: “In 1852, having translated a selection of the tales of Poe, Charles Baudelaire sent a copy of his work to Sainte-Beuve with the injunction: ‘Il faut, c’est-à-dire je désire, qu’Edgar Poe, qui n’est pas grand’chose en Amérique, devienne un grand homme pour la France’” (Jones 236). (It’s essential, that is to say I desire, that Edgar Poe, who isn’t popular in America, become a great man for France.) Compared to Françon’s statement,

one can perhaps infer that Baudelaire recognized, and more justly treated than contemporary French critics, his relation with Poe as a necessary influence for himself as an artist.

Whitman's Politics

In addition to Poe's importance for French Symbolists, we must now turn our attention to Walt Whitman's presence in Symbolism. As before mentioned in the introductory section, the vast majority of scholars do not know where to place Whitman in the Symbolist tradition. Erkkila says of Whitman's relation to Symbolism: "...no one has yet made an adequate study of Whitman's relationship to the French literary tradition" (Erkkila 58). While this study does not purport by any means to be such "an adequate study," Erkkila's illumination of the problem which underlies scholarship between Whitman and France, namely that it barely exists, also informs the scholarly piece-work with which we will here engage. Although scholarship which attempts to discredit Whitman's influence for Symbolist writers exists in conflicted and fractured pieces, the fact that both French and American critics have concerned themselves, though not fully or adequately with Whitman and Symbolism, suggests that there are connections between the two. To begin to deal with Whitman and Symbolism we will first ground our examination in his political relation to France and love for French liberalism.

Born in 1819, in the wake of the American and French Revolutions, the society in which Whitman grew up was largely negative in its understanding of French culture. As

Erkkila says of Franco-American relations after the American Revolution in 1775:

“Although there was a brief interlude of American sympathy and alliance with France during the period of the American Revolution and the early period of the French Revolution, the American people generally tended to associate France and the French language with atheism, anarchy, and immorality” (Erkkila 8). For one to either be pro- or anti- French in post-Revolutionary America meant that one also pledged allegiance to one of two sets of political and moral codes. As Erkkila explains, “To be pro-French was to be for Jefferson, the Democrats, agrarianism, and the common man; it was to champion social and moral liberty. To be anti-French was to be for Hamilton, the Federalists, aristocracy, and privilege; it was to champion social and moral restraint” (Erkkila 8). Whitman was of the former group. He believed that the fundamental desire for liberty which French citizens expressed in the Revolution of 1789 was the same desire Americans expressed only fourteen years earlier in their own revolution. On July fourteenth, Bastille Day, 1888 Whitman said in support of the human liberty both French and American revolutions fostered: “What America did for the Fourth, France did for the Fourteenth: both acts were of the same stock” (Whitman 467).

Whitman’s bond to France in the 1800s was an exception to the fear many Americans had of French liberalism which emerged from the French Revolution and terrorized their national consciousness. Defining liberalism in “Whitman the Democrat”, Kenneth Cmiel says: “Liberals made liberty the central political value. Liberty implied freedom from the coercive powers of government” (209). While “liberty implied freedom from the coercive powers of government,” it did not suggest lawlessness.

Liberals greatly feared the notion of “revolutionary radicals drenching the streets in blood, indiscriminately marching their opponents to the guillotine...” (Cmiel 207). In other words, liberals greatly feared the violent expression of liberty which manifested itself through mobs in the French Revolution.

Whitman’s personal political evolution from what Cmiel calls artisanal democracy; democracy invested in the working class, in the 1840s to transcendental democracy, democracy invested in only personal freedom, in 1850s shows his concern with the same liberalism which emerged from French Revolutionary thought. Cmiel says of artisanal democracy: “Politically, in the United States, artisans were the principal expositors of more radical versions of democracy. This was the culture from which Whitman came. His father was a carpenter, and early in life, Whitman alternately worked as a printer and carpenter” (Cmiel 211). However, even as an artisanal democrat, Whitman pushed the meaning of what other liberals of his time were practicing. As Cmiel says: “His principle political value was liberty, but he was actually more libertarian than many of the so-called ‘liberals’ of his own time. And, unlike more moderate liberals, he was untroubled by the crowd. His was a particularly populist form of liberal democracy” (Cmiel 214). He pays respect to this mob- induced liberalism in France as an ultimate upholder of liberty in his poem “France: The 18th Year of these States”. He says: “Hence I sign this salute over the sea, / And I do not deny that terrible red birth and baptism, / But remember the little voice that I heard wailing...” (Whitman 202). He signs to France, recognizing the violence which came from the Revolution as both a passage into life, “birth”, and a passage into salvation, “baptism”. These two

words then connect to “the little voice that [he] heard wailing” in that the violence of the Revolution came in response to the cries of the weak in society, which justifies violence for Whitman. Whitman held personal human liberty as the fundamental base from which the common man could express himself. He believed that even if the expression of liberty manifested in the same mob-mentality of the French Revolution, which still haunted the liberal American consciousness of this time, the ultimate expression of liberty would be well worth it.

Whitman’s evolution from artisanal democracy to transcendental democracy in the 1850s coincides with his general project in *Leaves of Grass* to express common human experience. Cmiel says of the reason for which Whitman’s personal politics evolved: “In the early 1850s [Whitman] grew increasingly disenchanted with mainstream politicians, especially for their evasion of the slavery issue” (Cmiel 216). Institutional government thus no longer upheld Whitman’s notion of individual human freedom as it abused human life through slavery. Whitman thus turned away from governmentally established democracy in order to express a more universal view of human life. As he says of his new political and human dealings in “One’s Self I Sing”: “Of Life immense in passion pulse, and power, / Cheerful, for freest action form’d under the laws divine, / The Modern Man I sing” (Whitman 1). Whitman surpasses the confines of governmental democracy to express the common bond and freedom all humanity shares under “laws divine”. However, he also takes care to say that while he represents every man’s voice, he does not condemn the institutions which purport to uphold liberty. He says in “I Hear it was Charged Against Me”: “I hear it was charged against me that I sought to destroy

institutions, / But really I am neither for nor against institutions” (Whitman 107).

Whitman makes this claim in poetic verse because as he sees it, even his form of love for all humanity is “The institution of the dear love of comrades” (Whitman 108). He can not thus be against the notion of the institution he, in a way, supports. By exercising love for mankind as his form of human liberalism in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman reforms the liberalism he earlier derived from French Revolutionary thought.

Whitman’s Poetic Function

Just as Whitman gained political and human perspective from French politics, he in turn enriched French poetry by way of the Symbolist project. Many scholars disagree about the extent of Whitman’s influence in Symbolism. However, the vast majority agree that, as Mathurin Dondo explains, “... [il] apporta aux innovateurs français la confiance et le courage dont ils avaient besoin pour conduire à bien leurs réformes” (Dondo 121-122) (“...provided French innovators with the confidence and the courage they needed to conduct successfully their own reforms”). By challenging both French and American critical opinions we will see that Whitman’s revolutionary use of free verse and metempsychosis provided Symbolists the necessary influence they needed to advance their own poetic project.

The connection between Whitman and Symbolism largely hinges upon his creation of free verse or as the French literally translate “vers libre”. One can define free verse as “poetry that does not follow a regular metrical pattern or rhyme scheme” (Barton and Hudson 91). Up until this point in literary history poets had largely worked in

measured and rhymed verse. As Edward Quinn comments: “Although scattered examples of free verse appear in earlier poetry, the great pioneer of the form was Walt Whitman, whose *Leaves of Grass* (1855) constituted a free verse manifesto” (133). By innovating poetic representation through free verse, Whitman shows a new way to represent the human experience mirrored in poetry. He created a new bond between poetic form and the way people consequently experience poetry through form. As Dondo says of experiencing free verse:

En réalité les accents se déplacent si librement que l’oreille perd toute conscience d’une mesure préétablie. Néanmoins les divisions rythmiques sont maintenues avec tant de justesse que le poème leur doit sa parfaite unité” (Dondo 110) (“In reality the accents are displaced so freely that the ear loses all consciousness of a pre-established measure. Nevertheless rhythmic divisions are maintained with so much justice that they give the poem its perfect unity”)

As this passage suggests, Whitman’s free verse is a conscious construction which affects the reader on both a cerebral and a visceral level. One comes to understand and thus appreciate the complex creation of verse by viscerally experiencing the poetic unity it creates through words to thus represent new poetic experience.

Symbolists may have found Whitman’s free verse the formal tool they needed to structurally recreate the poetic theory they earlier derived from Poe. Baudelaire explains of his own search for a new poetic expression: “Quel est celui de nous qui n’a pas, dans ses jours d’ambition, rêvé le miracle d’une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurté pour s’adapter aux mouvements lyriques d’âme, aux

ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience?” (Baudelaire 73-74) (“Who among us has not, in our ambitious days, dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, flexible enough and beaten enough to adapt itself to the lyrical movements of the soul, to the undulations of dreams, to the loops of consciousness?”). If the poetic form to which Baudelaire refers in this passage is to prose poetry and not free verse, it shares the latter’s aim of liberating poetry from the strictures of conventional versification. It is difficult to know if Baudelaire ever knew about Whitman’s poetic innovations because he never wrote about the American writer. However, Baudelaire did turn from verse poetry to prose poetry in the collection of fifty-one poems entitled *Le Spleen de Paris: Les Petits Poèmes en Prose* (The *Spleen of Paris: Small Prose Poems*) before his death in 1867. Quinn defines prose poetry as “a composition that, while printed as prose, displays the rhythms and types of imagery usually found in verse” (262). If Baudelaire did not know about Whitman’s innovations with free verse, his own original use of prose poetry bonds him to Whitman at least though analogous poetic originality. Both writers’ understandings of poetic verse unchained from past poetic tradition as it works to converse with the soul align with the larger Symbolist preoccupation to allusively suggest rather than concretely show. This move to then use formal technique, as Symbolists do with free verse, as a suggestive mechanism propels Symbolist literature further from the more scientifically determined view of humanity Naturalism offered.

Another way in which Whitman possibly influenced the Symbolist project was through his practice of metempsychosis. Metempsychosis refers to the larger notion of

the transmigration of the soul. In other words, metempsychosis explains the passing of the soul from either the human world to an after life or, in the case of Whitman, from one object or person to another through time and space. Malcolm Cowley says of Whitman's view of metempsychosis: "Immortality for Whitman took the form of metempsychosis... By means of metempsychosis and karma, we are all involved in a process of spiritual evolution that might be compared to natural evolution" (xxi). As we will soon see in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", Whitman relates his immortal soul to his contemporary reader through space and time, using nature as the intermediary which connects the two. He thus renders himself immortal through his soul which transcends his own corporeal and temporal limitations in an evolutionary-esque process. Cowley says: "He believed that true knowledge is to be acquired not through the senses or the intellect, but through union with the Self" (xxi). This union of the Self revealed an honest portrayal of the good and evil inherent in humankind. As he says in section twenty-one of "Song of Myself": "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul, / The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell / are with me, / The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue." (Whitman 41). Whitman aligns "The pleasures of heaven" which he comprehends as "the poet of the Body" with "the pains of hell" which he comprehends as "the poet of the Soul". Using his poetry as the intermediary space between body and soul, and heaven and hell, Whitman thus demonstrates the goal in his project of connecting the different realms through his poetry. Just as Symbolists ultimately work to demonstrate synesthesia as a way to elevate human

perceptions to the plane of the soul, Whitman achieves similar effect through metempsychosis.

One can most fully see Whitman's engagement with free verse and metempsychosis in his work "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". In this poem, which Whitman divides into nine sections and which comprises a portion of *Leaves of Grass*, the speaker watches ferry passengers and nature as he sees his soul reflected in both space and time. He begins:

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!

Clouds of the west- sun there half an hour high- I see you also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!

On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose,

And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose. (Whitman 134-135)

As this passage first superficially reveals, there is neither rhyme nor meter to Whitman's verse. However, as Dondo explained of his experience of free verse, there are unifying elements to the poetic form. One poetic tool which Whitman characteristically employs is alliteration, or the repeating of like sounds. In this particular section, Whitman strongly employs consonance, or the alliteration of consonant sounds. He stresses "F" through "Flood", "face", and "ferry"; "C" through "clouds", "crowds", and "curious"; "H" through "hundreds", "home", "hence", "half", "hour" and "high"; "M"

through “me”, “more”, “meditations”, and “might”. The flow, musicality, and unification these words create exemplify what Dondo earlier observed in asserting that certain elements in free verse can bond the poem as rhyme and meter once did. The unifying element at this point manifests through Whitman’s consonance.

On a more thematic level, this first section of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” reveals the speaker’s voice as his soul engages humans and nature. Instead of first addressing the human subject, the speaker looks to his natural surrounding as his equal: “Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face! / Clouds of the west- sun there half an hour high- I see you / also face to face.” (Whitman 134). Whitman relates to the water beneath him, and the clouds and sky around him, in order to first suggest that the material form of his body is the same material form as nature. Because human and nature are thus equal, a poem which will eventually address human to human relationship as equal must also engage its natural counterpart. Whitman shifts his connection from nature to his connection with humans as he bonds the human subject passing above the same waters and below the same skies as he: “And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose” (Whitman 135). He finds this future connection through his meditations, which is to say his process of reflection on both nature and his soul. These soulful meditations are thus what hold him both to nature and his fellow man, and which will always connect him to the two through time and space.

As Whitman develops “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” he views man, nature, and the soul through evil. He addresses the reader in the sixth section of the poem: “Nor is it you

alone who know what it is to be evil, / I am he who knew what it was to be evil, / I too knitted the old knot of contrariety, / Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd, / Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak, / Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant..." (Whitman 138). Whitman again employs consonance as the bonding force of free verse. However, he does it as a way which to hold together the human evil of which he sees himself and his reader as analogous parts. He refers to his reader in the present tense and himself in the past. He joins the two temporal spaces through his "old knot of contrariety", or listed deviant behavior, which he sees as fundamentally base to both his human experience and his readers'. Just as the benevolence of nature earlier bonded man to man, the evil of nature here bonds man to man.

Instead of concluding the poem in human evil, Whitman shows that his idea of metempsychosis is moreover a connection to a positively bonded space between worldly life and the eternity of the soul. He says in the concluding section:

Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide! ...

Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers!

Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta! stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn! ...

Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the air;

Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till all downcast eyes have time to take it from you! ...

We fathom you not- we love you- there is perfection in you also,

You furnish your parts towards eternity,

Great or small, you furnish your parts towards the soul. (Whitman 139-140)

Whitman's speaker concludes "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" much like he began it: by addressing the water beneath, the sky above, and the people in between. He addresses his surroundings, like he did earlier, as his equals. However, as he before says "Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!" he connects future men's reflections to the water into which he peers by saying "Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till all downcast eyes have time to take it from you!". In addition to this future reflection he, nature, and human kind will share, Whitman pushes human understanding of nature towards human understanding of eternity and the soul. Whitman here addresses metempsychosis by saying to nature "You furnish your parts towards eternity, / Great or small, you furnish your parts towards the soul." Just as the mountains stand, the birds fly, the human travels, and the water flows and shows the reflection of all, the interaction between humans, nature, and the underlying force which guides the two thus completes the transmigration of the soul from nature to human and also from human to human. Just as both Poe and Baudelaire bonded human experience to the realm of the soul through ideal, but logically incomprehensible forms of Beauty, Whitman does through metempsychosis.

French and American critics alike engage Whitman's free verse as it relates to Symbolist "vers libre". However, while critics generally recognize a connection between Whitman and Symbolism, they are largely unable to agree on the extent of his importance in the movement. By challenging the contradictions and complications in two critical

arguments, those of Thérèse Bentzon and Teodor de Wyzema, we will support

Whitman's place as a Symbolist influence.

In 1872 Bentzon published "Un Poète Américain, Walt Whitman: 'Muscle and Pluck Forever'" in the literary publication *La Revue des Deux Mondes*. While she uses the objective "on" ("one" or "they") in the following passage, Bentzon's work as a whole invalidates Whitman's poetry without bothering to see how his art reflects Symbolist poetic values of the time. She says of Whitman:

On parlait avec stupeur d'un poète dont les vers ne présentaient pas trace de rime, sauf dans un petit nombre de cas où la rime survenait comme par hasard; on parlait avec dégoût d'un prétendu novateur qui exprimait en termes confus, incorrects, grossiers, les paradoxes les plus extravagants que puissent inspirer l'esprit de révolte et le matérialisme; à ce nom de Walt Whitman s'attachaient à la fois le scandale et le ridicule (Bentzon 566)

(One spoke with stupor of a poet whose verses do not have a trace of rhyme, except in very few cases where the rhyme happens by chance; one spoke with disgust of a false innovator who expressed in confused, incorrect and crude terms, the most extravagant paradoxes which can inspire the spirit of revolt and materialism; scandal and ridicule attached themselves simultaneously to the name of Walt Whitman)

Bentzon too quickly devalues Whitman without seeing either the cultural or the poetic significance of his poetry. As we just saw in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", Whitman's use of consonance internally holds his poetry together, creating the "parfaite unité" which

Dondo attributes to free verse. This same perfect unity is the manifestation of what Baudelaire seems to have foreseen in his own vision of “une prose poétique”. Although Baudelaire largely wrote with measured rhyme and meter, as his speaker earlier describes “Les houles, en roulant...” (Baudelaire 63, ln 5) in “La Vie Antérieure” one can see his experimentation with assonance as a bonding poetic element.

In addition to Bentzon’s superficial and unfounded analysis of Whitman’s verse, her quickness to attribute his poetry to that which inspires materialism and revolt is likewise a superficial assessment. As we saw before in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, Whitman’s connection to his fellow man and their natural surroundings through the vastness of time and space inspire unity rather than revolt or materialism. It furthermore seems impossible to limit a man who claims to be “the poet of the Body and... the poet of the Soul” (Whitman 41) to such principles as revolt or materialism when his true intention, like Symbolists, is to eternally connect human and soulful experience through poetry.

Another prominent critic who attacked Whitman not for his poetic form but rather for his degree of influence on Symbolism is M. Teodor de Wyzewa. In 1892, the year of Whitman’s death, M. de Wyzewa published a contradictory article in *La Revue Bleue*. In this article de Wyzewa first expounds upon Whitman’s importance in Symbolism only to then assert that Whitman did not influence the movement in any way. He says:

Lorsque, dans quelques années, nous serons enfin débarrassés du XIXe siècle, les critiques chargés de procéder à sa liquidation seront stupéfaits d’avoir à constater l’énorme influence de Walt Whitman sur notre mouvement littéraire

contemporain. Car il leur faudra bien reconnaître que de toutes les innovations tentées depuis vingt-cinq ans dans notre littérature, et de celles qui touchent la forme, et de celles qui touchent les idées et les sentiments, il n'y en a pas une qui se trouve indiquée, réalisée, peut-être même exagérée dans le premier volume des poèmes de Walt Whitman, les *Brins d'Herbe*, publié en 1855 (qtd by Jones 23).

(When, in a few years, we will be rid of the 19th century, critics responsible for carrying out its liquidation will be shocked to have to take note of Walt Whitman's enormous influence on our contemporary literary movement. For they will have to truly recognize that of all innovations attempted in the last twenty-five years in our literature, and of those that touch form, and of those that touch ideas and feelings, there is not one that is indicated, realized, maybe even exaggerated in Walt Whitman's first volume of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1855).

De Wyzewa does not however sustain this flattering assessment of Whitman's poetic influence. He contradicts himself by soon after saying:

Les critiques du XX^e siècle auront là une excellent occasion de se tromper. Car malgré que les poèmes de Walt Whitman datent de 1855 et qu'ils présentent déjà en apparence, tous les caractères que présentent les oeuvres de nos écrivains d'aujourd'hui la vérité est qu'ils ont exercé sur le mouvement littéraire contemporaine aucune influence ou à peu près (qtd by Jones 24). (Twentieth century critics will have there an excellent occasion to be mistaken. For despite the fact that Walt Whitman's poems date from 1855 and that they already present

in appearance all the characteristics which appear in the works of today's writers, the truth is that they have exerted little or no influence on our contemporary literary movement).

Much like Bentzon attacked Whitman's specific poetic function without any true base for her criticism, de Wyzewa's claim equally falls apart for its contradiction in saying Whitman is both invaluable and useless in Symbolism. However, as Erkkila says of de Wyzewa's claim: "Although Wyzewa's conclusions are not justified by the evidence, his words of caution to the twentieth-century critic indicate some of the difficulty in studying Whitman's relation to the French Symbolists" (Erkkila 52). One such problem is to know just how much Symbolists knew of the specifics of Whitman's writing since the vast majority of his poetry appeared in scant translation. While we will more closely approach the issue of translation in our examination of Whitman and Arthur Rimbaud, it is essential to understand at this point that even though these two French critics attack Whitman's influence in Symbolism, their attacks hinge on superficial analyses and contradictory claims.

While Bentzon and de Wyzewa see Whitman's influence in France as transitory or non-existent, French artists Jules Laforgue, Francis Vielé-Griffin, and modern day critic Aaron Prevots see Whitman's influence as integral to French poetry. Around 1887, Laforgue had planned a complete translation of *Leaves of Grass* into French. However, as Erkkila asserts, "If Laforgue's premature death in 1887 had not prevented this project from being realized, Jules Laforgue would have performed the same function for Whitman in France as Baudelaire had earlier performed for Edgar Allan Poe" (Erkkila

70). As Erkkila continues to explain of Whitman's influence for the next generation of French poets: "Vielé-Griffin wanted to make Whitman known to the French literary public by carrying out Jules Laforgue's plan to do a complete translation of *Leaves of Grass*" (Erkkila 79). Although Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* did not appear in full print in France until 1909, the fact that his works began to appear both in their original forms and scantily translated by both accepting and doubting critics shows the larger interest French artists began to take to his poetry. Prevots says of Whitman's influence on French poetry: "Que l'on parle actuellement d'un retour au lyrisme en France, d'une préférence pour le poème en prose qui raconte le flux et le reflux d'impressions tirées du quotidien, prouve que Whitman a lui aussi laissé des traces sur la poésie française" (Prevots 322) ("That one actually speaks of a return to lyricism in France, of a preference for the prose poem which speaks to the ebb and the flow of daily experienced impressions, proves that Whitman also left certain traces on French poetry"). The traces Whitman left on French poetry to which Prevots refers are undoubtedly free verse. In the opinions of Laforgue, Vielé-Griffin, and Prevots, Whitman's influence extends deep into French verse to spark creative impulses and to challenge poetic form.

Whitman and Rimbaud

One such artist who may have taken special interest in Whitman's work was famous Symbolist writer Arthur Rimbaud. While it is impossible to know if Whitman had an unequivocal influence for Rimbaud, since he and Whitman did not have a literary

relationship like Baudelaire and Poe and since he never mentioned Whitman in writing, there are signs which suggest that the American author may have been more than a passing interest to the French poet. By examining Rimbaud's letter to Paul Demeny, and speculating about how Whitman's works could have reached the French poet, and juxtaposing Rimbaud's verse poem "Marine" to Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" I will suggest Whitman's importance in Rimbaud's artistic life.

A letter Rimbaud wrote to his friend Paul Demeny in 1871 aligns him with Whitman's efforts to stretch the parameters of poetic form and meaning. Rimbaud says of the poet's general relation to the soul: "Il cherche son âme, il l'inspecte, il la tente, l'apprend. Dès qu'il la sait, il la doit cultiver..." (Rimbaud 44) (He searches his soul, he inspects it, he tempts it, he learns it. As soon as he knows it, he cultivates it...). His concern with the poet as an individual who passes and transfers knowledge between man and the soul aligns him most closely with Whitman's concern with being "the poet of the Body and ... the poet of the Soul." In further developing his relation to the poet and the soul Rimbaud says: "Je dis qu'il faut être *voyant*, se faire VOYANT. Le Poète se fait *voyant* par un long, immense et raisonné *dérèglement* de *tous les sens*. Toute les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons pour n'en garder que les quintessences" (Rimbaud 45) (I mean that it is necessary to be a seer, to make yourself a seer. The poet makes himself a seer by a long, immense and reasoned disordering of all the senses. Every form of love, of suffering, of insanity; he searches for himself, he exhausts each of their poisons in himself to keep only their quintessences). This process of disordering the senses aligns Rimbaud's understanding

of sensory perception with both Baudelaire's and Whitman's. As we before saw how Baudelaire creates a synesthetic reaction in "La Vie Antérieure" to elevate human poetic experience to the plane of the soul, and how Whitman practices metempsychosis in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" as a way to transfer his soul over the vastness of time and space, Rimbaud approaches his soulful dealings by taking pieces from both. As we will soon see in his verse poem, "Marine," Rimbaud disconnects and rejoins sensory perception both thematically through language and literally through free verse to fill in a space between Baudelaire's synesthesia and Whitman's metempsychosis.

Aside from Rimbaud's desire to create a poetic form which would bond human to soul, another poetic feature Rimbaud has in common with Whitman is free verse.

While Rimbaud was searching for a way in which to experiment with poetic form, he turned away from what Baudelaire had done with measured rhyme and meter. As he says to Demeny about Baudelaire's poetic form: "Baudelaire est le premier voyant, roi des poètes, un vrai *Dieu*. Encore a-t-il vécu dans un milieu trop artiste; et la forme si vantée en lui est mesquine. Les inventions d'inconnu réclament des formes nouvelles"

(Rimbaud 51) (Baudelaire is the first seer, king of poets, a true *God*. Still he had lived in a society too artistic; and the form so vaunted in him is petty-minded. The inventions of the unknown call for new forms). One such form for Rimbaud was free verse. In defending Whitman's importance in Rimbaud's discovery or personal invention of free verse, it is essential to understand how the revolutionary poetic form could have reached Rimbaud. About a year after he wrote his letter to Demeny, Thérèse Bentzon published the critical review of Whitman we earlier examined. While Bentzon certainly hoped to

defame the American poet in the eyes of the French literary public, she perhaps did the inverse for Rimbaud. As Erkkila says of the relation between Bentzon's article and Rimbaud: "The Whitman article by... Thérèse Bentzon, which Rimbaud probably read in 1872, included translations of passages from such poems as 'Starting from Paumanok,' 'Salut Au Monde,' and 'There was a Child Went Forth'... In such lines, Rimbaud would have recognized many of his own ideas on the new poetry..." (Erkkila 62). These translations, which by and large do not respect Whitman's alliteration or free verse, would have at least demonstrated to Rimbaud that Whitman was also searching and successfully employing "des formes nouvelles" in his poetry. I assert that from here, Rimbaud would have especially been able to implement the poetic innovations he saw already alive and well on the other side of the Atlantic.

We will now more closely examine "Marine" in comparison to "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." As translating Rimbaud's enigmatic works into English poses innumerable syntactic and thematic problems, I will use a translation Charles Minahen offers in *Vortex/t: The Poetics of Turbulence*. By viewing this poem firstly as a structural representation of both Whitman's and Rimbaud's analogous use of free verse and secondly as an example of metempsychosis and synesthesia we will further defend Whitman's possible influence in Rimbaud's artistic plan.

In employing his version of free verse, Rimbaud uses a type of enjambment which is also characteristic of Whitman. Rimbaud's enjambment connects isolated clauses to form unified strophic structure:

Les chars d'argent et de cuivre–

Les proues d'acier et d'argent–

Battent l'écume,–

Soulèvent les souches des ronces.

Les courants de la lande,

Et les ornières immenses du reflux,

Filent circulairement vers l'est,

Vers les piliers de la forêt,–

Vers les fûts de la jetée,

Don't l'angle est heurté par des tourbillons de lumière (Rimbaud 142).

(“Chariots of silver and copper– / Prows of steel and silver– / Beat the foam, – /

Raise up the stumps of bramble. / The currents of the moor, / And the immense ruts of the
ebb tide, / Flow circularly toward the east, / Toward the pillars of the forest, – / Toward
the boles of the jetty, / Whose angle is struck by vortices of light.” [Minahen 117-118])

Viewing each clause in relation to the poem's punctuation, one can see that the relationship between punctuation and image provides structural unity and cohesiveness to the poem. The first line, for example, seems to spatially orientate the reader in the richness of a chariot on land. However, the second line, which Rimbaud bonds to the first through enjambment, orientates the reader to textural richness on the sea. While the two clauses seem to be in apparent contradiction with one another, the third line, which joins to the following and preceding lines alike, clarifies the verbal action which the two share. While it still does not make logical sense at this time on a thematic level as to how

chariots and ships could situate themselves on, respectively, land and sea, the poem's enjambment bonds the images and carries the reader through the following clauses.

The poem continues to thematically confuse the difference between land and sea, as commas and verbs replace dashes and nouns. This comma and verb takeover also marks the point of movement, as three active verbs: "battent", "soulèvent", and "filent" supply the necessary action for movement towards the final binding enjambment of the poem. At this moment, the thematic element of unifying light works with the last enjambment to thematically bond the land and sea as punctuation and verbal clauses bond the poem's actual structure. The bond Rimbaud structurally creates between land, sea, and light further relates his unification of perception in "Marine" to Whitman's process of metempsychosis in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."

Rimbaud's speaker, like Whitman's, situates the poetic subject in natural context to ultimately blur the distinction between wild natural space and habitable human space. Yet whereas Whitman more specifically orientates his poetic subject over a body of water and beneath a sea of clouds by specifically saying, "Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face! / Clouds of the west...I see you / also face to face" (Whitman 134), Rimbaud employs seemingly contradictory language with "Les courants de la lande" and "les ornières immenses du reflux" (Rimbaud 142) to mark his spatial orientation. Although it may seem contradictory for Rimbaud to describe land as having currents, a feature unique to water, and the tide as having ruts, a feature unique to land, this type of linguistic crossing serves to cast two contrasting spaces of land and water as identifiable with each

other. By crossing terrestrial and aqueous forms, Rimbaud thus poetically achieves the same bond as Whitman by unifying the natural spaces in which humans dwell.

Developing the notion of spatial orientation, both Rimbaud and Whitman ultimately demonstrate that human relation to natural space provides a way in which to communicate the soul through nature and time. Whitman achieves this unity between man, nature, and soul, as we earlier saw, by speaking directly to the nature which surrounds him, and to the people to which he sees himself eternally bonded in the space of nature. He recognizes all the portions of nature and humanity which comprise a complete world view when he says “You furnish your parts towards eternity, / Great or small, you furnish your parts towards the soul” (Whitman 140). He holds the realm of the soul as humanity’s final space of unification between man and nature. Rimbaud handles his soulful unity in a more abstract, even surreal fashion. By structurally isolating different clauses in unique lines unified through punctuation, one can read his structural unification as the visual representation of the unity of man and nature in a third state of perspective in the soul. This however becomes more apparent on a thematic level when the speaker employs the image of “des tourbillons de lumière” to join land and sea in the intermediary, yet binding space between, which I assert to be the eternal space of the soul. He achieves this effect through movement. The four main actors in the poem which participate in movement are two objects of human transportation, chariots and prows, and two natural features of land and sea, the currents of the moor and the ruts of the ebb tide. As the speaker describes, the chariots and the prows disrupt both the waters on which they travel and the naturally growing stumps of bramble. This human

movement however, pulses much the same as the natural tide which washes through land and sea in like energy. These two similar paths do not ravage the space of which they are both destructive and constituent parts. The energy which manifests in both instead provides a surface off of which light refracts, sending their now equally bonded forces back into the eternity of space and time. I suggest here that this rebounding light, which thus refracts off the metallic sides of the silver and copper chariots, the steel and silver prows, and the tides and moors of the land and sea serves as an element independent of but complementary to the already existent human and natural energy in the poem. This light thus represents the same potential Whitman's soul has to extend between generations of human and natural life, bonding forms of the corporeal and natural world to those which extend beyond our mortal beings.

While I suggest Whitman's importance for Rimbaud in both his dealings with free verse and his ideas of communication with the soul, I realize this view is limited. Rimbaud did not date many of his poems, so it is nearly impossible to say with absolute certainty when he wrote that which seems to align with Whitman's poetic project. However, since Rimbaud became disillusioned with his own art and stopped writing all together around 1873 or 1874, not long after the time we earlier showed he wrote to Demy and could have read Bentzon's article, we can at the latest date his poetry in the earlier 1870s, fifteen years after Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* came into print. As demonstrated earlier, it seems that there is more than coincidence which connects the poetry of these two innovative giants. Both men, as Erkkila says, "represented a new and revolutionary departure, a revolt of the basically illogical flux and flow of things against

the orderly, artistic constructs of the past” (Erkkila 69). At this time in the scholarship between the two, scholars must challenge the confines which hold Rimbaud’s poetry to France and Whitman’s to America to more comprehensively understand how they complement and work from each other as innovative giants.

Conclusion

Between the 1850s and 1870s as pre- and early Symbolists began to create their own poetic projects, they culturally reacted against Naturalism and Positivism to reform French poetry. While the Symbolist movement reacted against its own set of social and artistic confines in France, early Symbolists looked to American writers for the formal and theoretical tools they needed to practice their art. Edgar Allan Poe’s poetic plan served Symbolist progenitor Charles Baudelaire with the theoretical ideas of ideal Beauty and haunting effect. Walt Whitman’s use of free verse and metempsychosis on the other hand perhaps served as an analogous inspiration for early Symbolist innovator Arthur Rimbaud.

While this study has been particularly focused in scope, it has responded to and developed previous scholarship concerned with tracing American influence in French literary Symbolism. As we have seen, most scholars agree that Poe’s poetic plan was necessary for Baudelaire as he developed what would become Symbolism. We have especially connected the two writers through their analogous use of poetic effect to channel ideal Beauty and thus demonstrate what Poe calls “mournful and never-ending remembrance.” We have also linked Whitman to France, challenging much of previous

scholarship on Symbolism. We related Whitman to France through his own political liberalism(s) to then connect Arthur Rimbaud to Whitman's free verse and representation of the soul through metempsychosis. In linking these four innovative writers, I have ultimately suggested the importance of American influence on French Symbolism.

Although this study has brought together American and French poetics through Symbolism, there still remains much for scholars to explore. One area of study which still lies dormant, and which I did not address due to the time limitations of this project, concerns Rimbaud's *Illuminations*. Visually, this work has the same fluid quality as Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Thematically, it often provides readers with introspective ponderings which relate the soul to quotidian life, like in *Leaves of Grass*. However, as we saw earlier, since Rimbaud did not date much of his work, it is difficult to assert beyond mere speculation if he had Whitman in mind while writing. Another area of intertextual connectivity which scholars have yet to fully exhaust is the larger bond between Poe, Whitman, and later Symbolist writers. By joining American influence to later Symbolist texts, scholars can continue to challenge and build new links between French and American writers. For as both groups sought deeper poetic understanding, the analogous artistic innovations in Symbolism and nineteenth-century American writings have served to eternally bond French and American poetics through Poe, Baudelaire, Whitman, and Rimbaud.

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